

# Alfred Jacob Miller



Baltimore Sketches, 1825-1870

from the Middendorf Collection

In 1963 Mr. and Mrs. J. William Middendorf II acquired a scrapbook in which the Baltimore artist, Alfred Jacob Miller, had pasted 101 of his drawings. Each drawing was accompanied by an explanatory or humorous comment in the artist's handwriting. (These have been transcribed on to the exhibition labels for the present exhibition.) This group of illustrations forms a rare continuous portrayal of life in an American city over a lengthy period. The earliest sketches are dated 1825 and the latest 1870.

Miller presumably created his Baltimore sketchbook for the pleasure of his family and friends, as it illustrated scenes, situations, possibly even individuals with which they would have been intimately familiar. It also reflects an interest in genre which is notable in American painting from the second quarter of the nineteenth century. A wide range of subjects caught Miller's attention and was recorded by his pen — politics, women's rights, the slave question, the Civil War, maritime and domestic scenes. His drawings are peopled by the affluent and the poor, drunks and fops, octagenarians and children.

The selection of approximately fifty of these drawings (dismounted and individually framed) for exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art presents a little-known side of Miller's oeuvre.

The artist was born in Baltimore in 1810. He studied painting first under Thomas Sully, who was in Baltimore in 1831-32, and in 1833-34 at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, Paris and the English Life School in Rome. His portrait studio, established in 1834 in Baltimore, did not flourish, so in 1837 he moved to New Orleans. There Miller met the wealthy Scottish explorer, Captain William Drummond Stewart, who invited him to accompany his expedition to Wyoming. During the six months or so they traversed the Rockies, Miller made over 100 on-the-spot sketches, which were his reference source for many oil and watercolor paintings of Indians and western scenes completed in the studio over the next thirty years. Miller resided with Stewart in Scotland from 1840-42, when he elaborated and enlarged many of these designs to decorate the walls of Murthly Castle. Following his return to Baltimore in 1842, Miller successfully established himself as a portraitist until his death in 1874. These portraits and his western oils and watercolors represent the most widely recognized of Miller's artistic accomplishments.

Wendy J. Shadwell

Curator of the Middendorf Collection



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Front:

"Pat. "Here is a shilling!—recollect you owe me six-pence." "God bless yer honor,"—And may ye live—till I pay ye. 9¾ x 6¼" Ink and wash.

Recollections. One of the Dogberry's of 1825 Bal! After crying the hour of Ten, he slept soundly in his box—until roused again always giving Thieves & vagabonds a wide birth [sic]. 8½ x 5¾". Ink and wash.



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